

Zola, they called on him, but found him absent. In February, 1868, however, still remembering his article on their book, they wrote to him in praise of "The'rese Raquin," in which they detected the hand of an artist, one who had probed human truth and crime to the core.¹

From Alexis's account it has been inferred by several writers that Zola and the Goncourts became intimate in 1865; but the latter's "Journal" shows, peremptorily, that they did not actually meet till December 14, 1868,² when Zola lunched with the brothers at their house on the Boulevard Montmorency, at Auteuil. This time the approaches probably came from Zola.³ The Goncourts were preparing their novel "Madame Gervaisais," and he, with the idea of writing an anticipatory article on it, seems to have applied for information, whereupon he was invited to the Goncourts' house. They had pictured him as somewhat of a *Norman*, a pedagogue, and they found him sickly, nervous, anxious, deep, intricate, in fact almost a riddle! He told them of the difficulties of his position, admitted that his novel, "Madeleine Fexat," ran off the rails and ought to have been limited to three characters; complained of having to conform to idiotic editorial opinions in some articles he was then contributing to "La Tribune," a weekly opposition

journal, and expressed a keen desire to find a publisher who, over a term of six years, would pay him a sum of thirty thousand francs for eight novels, in which the history of a family would be recounted.⁴ This history, of course, was

¹ "Lettres de Jules de Goncourt," p. 273 (February 5, 1868).

² "Journal des Goncourt," Paris, 1888, I^{re} S^{erie}, Vol. III.

⁸ "Lettres de Jules de Goncourt." See those of January 10, January 17, and April 10, 1869.

* "Journal des Goncourt," Vol. III, p. 245 *et seq.*